

**TESTIMONY IN FAVOR OF RAISED BILL NO. SB 821
AN ACT CONCERNING MARITAL AND FAMILY THERAPISTS**

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Dear Members of the Insurance Committee:

I am the Director of the Master's program in Marriage and Family Therapy at Central Connecticut State University. I am both a licensed marriage and family therapist and a licensed psychologist. I ask for your rejection of Raised Bill #821, "An Act Concerning Marital and Family Therapists." This bill would eliminate the ability for marital and family therapists from providing valuable and effective treatment to citizens of the State of Connecticut. Marriage and family therapists are experts at working with individuals, couples, families, and groups to resolve emotional and behavioral problems and to help families cope with stress. At a time when so many families are facing one of the largest crises in our time that threatens the very fabric of the family, I am shocked and outraged that this bill is even being raised.

My purpose in presenting this testimony is to present the qualifications of marriage and family therapists (or MFTs) for your consideration to reject this bill. I am also speaking from my perspective as a psychologist who is committed to the advancement of marriage and family therapy and who "puts my money where my mouth is" by holding a dual license as an LMFT. In becoming involved in training Master's level MFTs, I have deepened my respect and admiration for the competence and perspective that the field brings to the human services arena.

The MFT field is now a separate and distinct licensed profession, requiring over 60 credit hours of academic work, including two years of practicum and internship experiences under intensive supervision. MFT students take courses in individual, group, couples, and family therapies; human development; professional ethics and family law; research; and diagnosis and assessment of mental disorders. They are taught from the perspective of systems theory, which provides a "zoom lens" for looking at human problems in a comprehensive way, and are uniquely trained to intervene at multiple levels, ranging from the individual to larger systems.

After graduation, MFTs must provide 1000 hours of clinical service with at least 100 hours of supervision by a licensed MFT in order to sit for the licensing exam. Once licensed, an MFT may assess and treat individuals, couples, families, and groups. They work in many human services settings and address the full range of problems that present clinically. Licensed MFTs are currently eligible for 3rd party reimbursement, on parity with the other licensed mental health professions. Our state government, in addition to the licensure, has also scrutinized the value and qualifications of MFTs through the assignment of a state civil service classification for MFTs and by the certification of MFTs by the state Department of Education to work in the schools as a School Certified MFT. These were granted by vote of the full legislature and with the assent of the Governor.

There is plenty of data to support the efficacy of family therapy in treating a wide range of mental health and behavioral problems, and is cited in the professional literature of the field. As an example, here in Connecticut, there has been testimony by a representative of the Westbrook School District in support of the MFT School Certification act that for the first year of having an MFT in the school system to work directly with families, the cost of outplacement of problem students dropped from \$1,000,000 to \$180,000. I submit to you that this is a significant savings! Services provided by MFTs are cost-effective, powerful, and tend to be brief in nature. The inclusion of person's social network in the process of resolving problems presented in therapy has been shown to facilitate recovery in substance abuse treatment, the treatment of schizophrenia and bi-polar disorder, and depression. I would be glad to provide sources, if requested.

As the director of CCSU's program, I can give you a sense of the demand on both sides. On the student demand side, we graduate an average of 25 MFTs a year. Of those who graduate, over 90% are employed in the field one year after graduation. On the community demand side, we place in community agencies over 50 students per year in a 2nd-year practicum and a 3rd year internship. This constitutes over 40,000 hours of volunteer service to families in need across the Connecticut per year by our students. Students in the MFT field are highly sought-after by various types of service providers because of their high level of training and effectiveness of the services they provide. In addition to CCSU's program, there are five other MFT programs in the state, including a doctoral program at UConn, and Master's programs at SCSU, St. Josephs College, UConn, and Fairfield University. Taking away parity of MFTs to compete for compensation with other mental health professionals would essentially destroy the field in this state and deprive our citizens of important, cost-effective, and much-needed services. I urge you to reject this bill.